

MILITARY AND POLITICAL LEADERS OF WORLD WAR II

The Rise of Dictators &
Triumph of the Allies During World War II

The Characteristics of Fascism

- Fascist governments are *totalitarian* leaders – leaders who are dictators and do not tolerate any opposition, or dissent.
- Every fascist nation has a fictitious “glorious history.” For the Nazis, it was the a virtually mythological “Aryan” race, which they credited with scientific and political innovations since the birth of civilizations. Fascists in Italy recalled the Roman Empire. In both cases, the countries were *extremely nationalistic*.
- Fascist nations are all *militant*, war-like, and aggressive.
- Fascist nations believe that they are *racially and culturally superior* to all of their rivals, and hence, entitled to rule them.



There are dictators, and there are dictators.

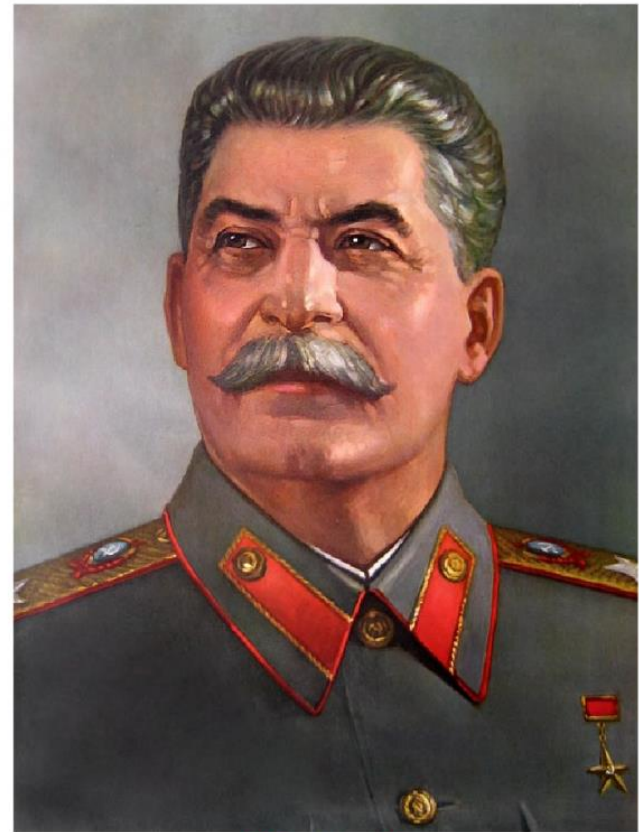
- First of all, not all dictators are fascists. Consider the dictator Josef Stalin. He was the communist dictator of the Soviet Union during World War II, and he had risen to power as a part of the Bolshevik Revolution, during the Great War, in Russia in 1917.
- In Spain, as a result of Nazi interference during the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939) a dictator named Generalissimo Francisco Franco rose to power. Although he had many of the characteristics of a fascist, and he had been aided into power by Hitler himself, he played virtually no role in World War II.

Dictators in Europe during the 1930s

Gen. Francisco Franco



Marshall Josef Stalin



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What allowed dictators into power?

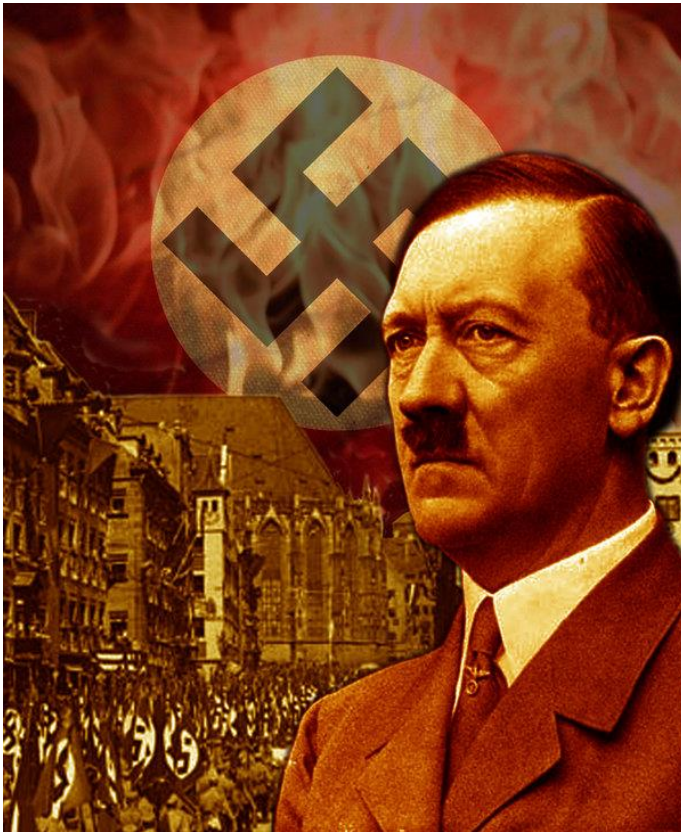
- First, Europe had been devastated by World War I, and the map of Europe had literally been redrawn after the war. Catastrophic damages and extreme poverty made many Europeans desperate for change.
- Several nations – especially Germany and Italy – felt that they had been unfairly treated by the Treaty of Versailles. Germans felt that they had been unfairly blamed for starting the war, and that the reparations they were forced to pay were too high. In Italy, many citizens believed that they had not been given enough land at the end of the war. They felt that since they had been on the winning side, they deserved a portion of the spoils.

What allowed dictators into power?

- With so much poverty and despair in Europe, the people of many nations rapidly grew frustrated. They considered democracy too weak and too slow, and looked for leadership to dictators. These men blamed outsiders and marginalized groups for the problems of their nations and proposed quick solutions which were not sustainable.
- In Italy, Benito Mussolini rose to power promising to restore Italy to the glory it had known during the Roman Empire by building up its military and establishing colonies in Africa and in the Balkans.
- Meanwhile, in Germany, Adolf Hitler blamed the Jewish population of Germany for causing all of the problems their society faced.
- Both men agreed that the Treaty of Versailles was unjust, and both men began to re-militarize their nations in violation of the Treaty's basic tenets.

The Rise of Fascist Dictators in Europe

Adolf Hitler in Germany



Benito Mussolini in Italy





THE LEADERS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Military and Political Leaders of the Second World War

General Dwight David Eisenhower

He planned and took personal responsibility for the success or failure of Operation Overlord, the invasion of the European continent carried out on June 6, 1944 along the beaches of Normandy, France. Early during the invasion, he feared that all was lost, and came close to calling off the assault on Omaha Beach. Thankfully, the soldiers conquered the beachhead against seemingly insurmountable odds. He later went on to become the President of the United States of America.



Prime Minister Winston Churchill

He became the Prime Minister of England once World War II began; his frequent radio addresses encouraged the British to continue fighting against Nazi Germany, no matter what the odds. At the outset of the war, he stated, "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."



Rosie “the Riveter”

She encouraged American women to take jobs in manufacturing and supply during World War II, since so many men were fighting the war. She worked in a plant making war materials for the Allies. There were actually many of her – some produced by artists like Norman Rockwell (right) or the more well know version by J. Howard Miller. But really, “Rosie” the Riveter refers to all of the American women who worked to supply the Allies during World War II.



President Harry S Truman

This American President made the decision to drop a nuclear bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945. Although the atomic weapons resulted in the death of almost 200,000 Japanese civilians, he claimed not to have lost a moment of sleep over the decision, because it saved American lives and brought the war to a quicker conclusion. He would also serve as the President of the United States during the Korean War.



General Douglas MacArthur

He left the Philippine Islands two months before they surrendered to the Japanese, vowing, "I Shall Return." At the end of World War II, he did return! In fact, in September of 1945, he accepted the surrender of the Japanese on board the USS Missouri in Tokyo Harbor. And, yes, he is the guy they named the MacArthur Mall after. He's actually buried right in the middle of downtown Norfolk at the MacArthur Memorial.



Benito Mussolini

He was the leader of Italy during World War II, who was executed by his own people after the liberation of Rome in 1944. He rose to power as the leader of the Fascist Party in Italy, proclaiming that the Treaty of Versailles was unfair, and that Italy should restore the Roman Empire through warfare and conquest. When Rome fell to the Allies in July of 1944, Mussolini was executed by his own people.



Neville Chamberlain

He was the British Prime Minister who signed the Munich Pact and allowed Hitler to take over parts of Europe by adopting a strategy of appeasement. Today, his name is associated with the weak policy at the Munich Conference. As soon as the war began in Europe – in September of 1939, with the invasion of Poland, Chamberlain was replaced as Prime Minister by the Conservative Party's leader.



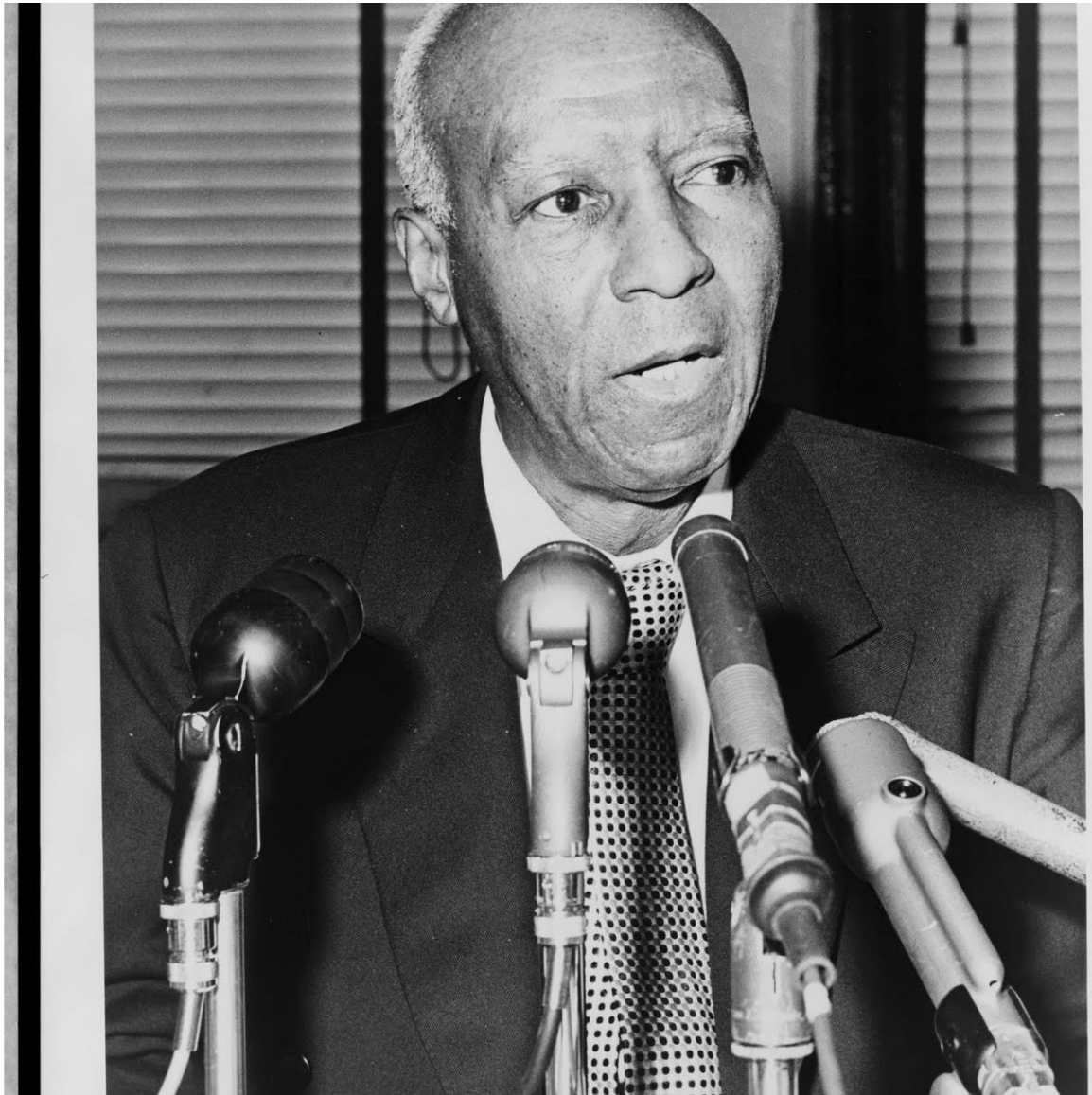
General George Patton

This American general closed in on Erwin “The Desert Fox” Rommel and chased him out of North Africa in 1943. Later in the war, he led his men during the Battle of the Bulge. When World War II ended with the defeat of Germany, he still sought to fight – this time against the Soviets. There is a famous movie documenting his life – which came to an abrupt and tragic end in 1945 as the result of an automobile collision.



Asa Philip Randolph

This African-American labor union leader forced the President of the United States (FDR) to ban all discrimination against African-Americans in the defense industries or in the granting of government contracts. Later in his life, he would organize the famous March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom – where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the “I Have a Dream” Speech.



The Tuskegee Airmen

Benjamin O. Davis was the leader of this group, an all-black squadron of fighter pilots who fought over Italy and Germany during World War II. During the war, the men flew thousands of sorties – leaving from Italy, flying over enemy targets in Central Germany, and then returning. The segregated unit was able to demonstrate the ability of African-American pilots in action.



Haile Selassie

This Ethiopian leader begged for assistance from the League of Nations and other European powers when Mussolini invaded his nation during the 1930s. He stated prophetically, "It is us today. It will be you tomorrow." The story of the invasion of Ethiopia – and the powerlessness of the League of Nations to do anything about it – only empowered the fascist dictators of Europe to continue their evil ways.



Josef Stalin

He was the dictator of the Soviet Union who signed a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. By 1940, his nation was at war with Germany, though. He was a brutal and murderous dictator, but he helped the Allies defeat Hitler. After the war came to an end, he almost immediately severed ties with the United States and England, whose capitalist economies were in opposition to his command system.



Hideki Tojo

Will someone please explain to me how you write a textbook on American history without including this man's name? He was the Prime Minister and leading General in Japan who authorized the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In many ways, his leadership was fascist in nature – it was a uniquely Japanese version of the system, though. It was warlike – the Empire of Japan had been at war for over ten years by then, having invaded Manchuria, in China, in 1931. Like other fascists, the Japanese considered themselves to be a superior race to their Asian neighbors.



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

He was the President of the United States when Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese, and he called December 7, 1941, "a date that will live in infamy." Even before the United States entered the war, he had sought to aid our European Allies against Nazi Germany. He died in April of 1945, just months before the conclusion of World War II.



Admiral Chester Nimitz

Although Douglas MacArthur took much of the credit, this man was the leader of the United States armed forces in the Pacific Theatre. He adopted a strategy of island hopping in order to defeat the Japanese. Nimitz was not as outspoken as MacArthur, yet his contributions to the defense of the nation have not gone unnoticed. There is a class of aircraft carriers in the US Navy which bears his name today.

